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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000535

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NEA/ELA
NSC FOR MARCHESE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/03/2016
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: INITIAL SARG RESPONSE TO OUR DIRECT ACCESS
NON-PAPER

REF: A. DAMASCUS 472

[1](#)B. GENEVA 1018

Classified By: CDA Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.5 b/d

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 4.

[1](#)2. (C) On June 3, the Syrian MFA summoned the Charge to respond to our demarche delivered on May 17 (ref A) requesting a SARG response to the USG Iraq non-paper. Hussam A'ala, Deputy FM Faisal Mikdad's Office Director, told Charge that the SARG had reviewed the non-paper, which A/S Sauerbrey gave to D/FM Mikdad in Geneva (ref B). A'ala said SARG officials are looking at how IOM would process U.S. refugee cases and he had been instructed to propose that processing at IOM should occur at the U.S. embassy in Damascus instead. Noting that he hoped the SARG understood how IOM worked, Charge told A'ala that processing refugees for resettlement in the U.S. had long occurred in IOM facilities in Syria and promised A'ala a non-paper with the history of the program when A'ala expressed his lack of understanding on how the program currently operated. Charge also commented that the embassy lacked the facilities to process Iraqi refugee cases and that doing so would carry serious security implications for our already vulnerable mission. A'ala suggested the process of deliberating was still underway and said he would revisit the issue in the MFA.

[1](#)3. (C) Expressing his belief that the U.S. should be looking at the totality of the issue, A'ala commented that donors like the EU, Japan, and others had recently provided the SARG with specifics on assistance they were currently providing and additional assistance they would be interested in providing to Iraqi refugees in Syria. A'ala asked that the USG provide similar assistance information specific to Iraqi refugees in Syria.

[1](#)4. (U) Action request: In response to the Syrian MFA's request, post requests that PRM prepare a paper that specifies the assistance the USG is providing or contemplating providing to Iraqi refugees in Syria.

[1](#)5. (U) Working with IOM and PRM tdy'er, Gerry Cheyne, post quickly sent A'ala an informal non-paper on how refugees are currently processed for resettlement in the U.S. We will email the non-paper to both PRM and NEA/ELA.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment. We do not think the SARG has decided how to

tackle the Iraqi refugee issue. We believe this initial response reflects the security services' concerns but we still think the MFA wants to be flexible on the refugee issue. However, given the SARG's anger over the UNSC's recent establishment of the Hariri tribunal, the security services will continue to interfere. Our proposed strategy is to press the MFA to come up with a favorable response as soon as possible to allow IOM to conduct the direct access program in Syria. The best means to do this is to highlight the fact that the direct access program is a response to both Syrian and international requests for more assistance to Iraqi refugees here and that the program under IOM would be one small part in the larger international effort to assist refugees in line with the 1951 Convention on Refugees and subsequent protocols. Because of A'ala's unhelpful response to our request, Charge did not press him for specifics but proposes instead to give the SARG additional information that will help SARG decision-makers better shape their offer. In the end, the SARG senses the direct access program is very important to us and they may, therefore, either make it more difficult to establish or just say no.

CORBIN